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The Diamonds of India

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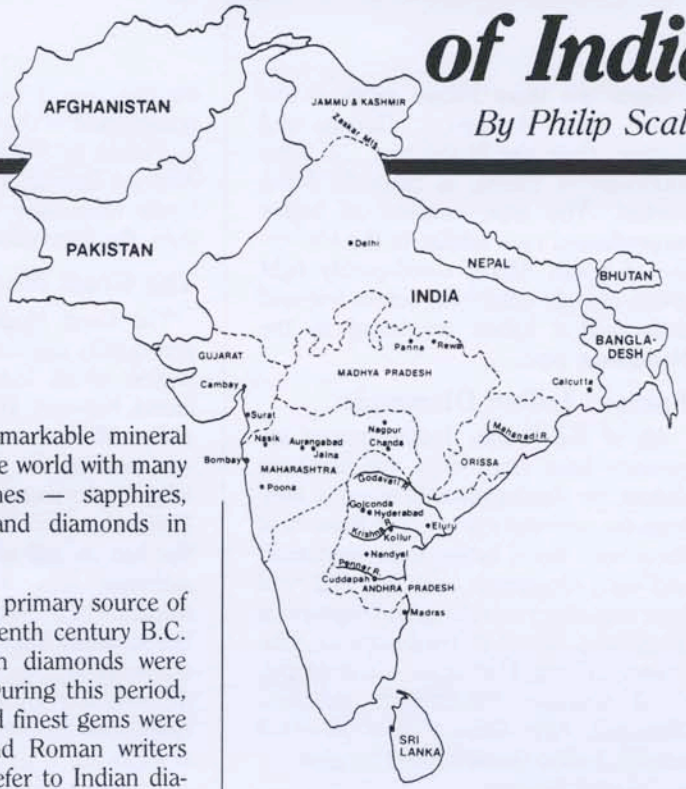
By Philip Scalisi



India, a land of remarkable mineral wealth, has provided the world with many of the finest gemstones — sapphires, rubies, moonstones, and diamonds in particular

India was the world's primary source of diamonds from the seventh century B.C. until 1728 A.D., when diamonds were discovered in Brazil. During this period, many of the largest and finest gems were found. Both Greek and Roman writers (Pliny, Ptolemy, etc.) refer to Indian diamond sources. The earliest Sanskrit accounts of diamonds occur in the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthasastra*, two great Indian epic poems. The first detailed and well-chronicled account of the Indian diamond fields was provided by Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1605 to 1689), a famous French jeweler and traveler who journeyed to India six times between 1631 and 1668. Some of the world's most famous diamonds have passed through his hands.

All important Indian diamond districts occur along the eastern edge of the Deccan Plateau. They extend from the Penner River (14°N latitude) to the lower tributaries of the Ganges River (25°N latitude). In general, they may be divided into four regions: southern, central, eastern, and northern.

The Southern or Golconda District, Andhra Pradesh State

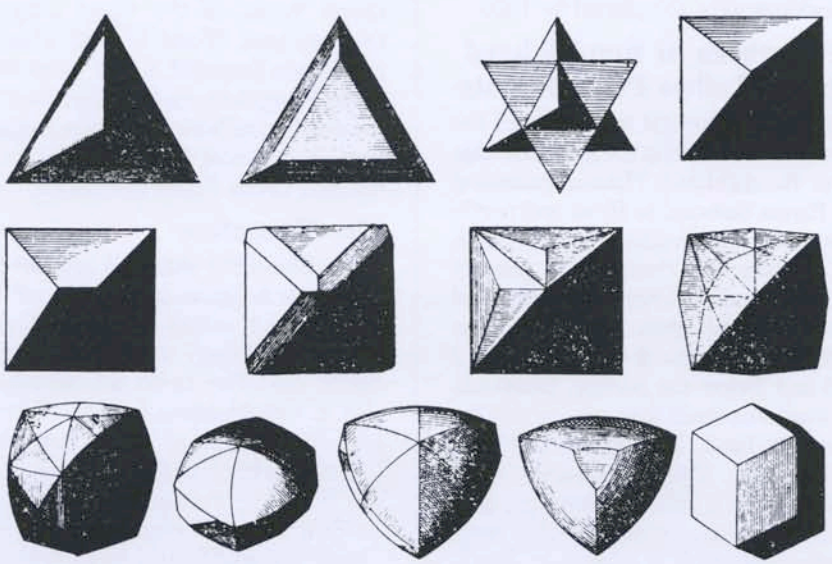
The most important mines in the Golconda District are along the Penner (Pennar), Krishna (Kristna, Kistna), and Godavari (Godivari) rivers, all of which discharge into the Bay of Bengal. The principal localities are Cuddapah, Anantapur, Bellary, Kurnool, Guntur, Mahbubnagar, Kollur, Partial, Golapilly, Eluru (Ellore), and Nandyal (Nandial).

The city of Golconda was the capital of the medieval state of Golconda, formerly called the ancient Kingdom of the Deccan. Golconda was not a mining region, but rather a market for the cutting, selling, and distribution of diamonds from neighboring areas. The city now lies in ruins several miles from Hyderabad.

The richest and most famous mines are those at Kollur on the Krishna River in the former State of Golconda. This locality was referred to as *Gani Coulour* (Persian for *Kollur Mine*) by Tavernier. He reported that this diamond deposit was discovered in 1560 by an accidental find of a 25-carat stone and was worked by as many as 60,000 people. He also reported that the best stones had a green crust, but "when cut they proved to be white and of very beautiful water." The workings were quite shallow and the diamond-bearing horizon was approximately one foot thick. The Koh-i-nur, Great Mogul, and Hope diamonds are among those reputedly found at Kollur. The workings are exhausted and now completely deserted.

On the north bank of the Krishna River, east of Chintapilly, are the Partial mines. They were active until 1850, and are now abandoned. The Regent or Pitt diamond came from these mines.

Three kimberlite pipes have been discovered in Andhra Pradesh since 1961, but no diamonds have been found.



Diamond crystal forms, India. After Romé de l'Isle. From *Atlas der Krystallformen* by Victor Goldschmidt. 9 vol's. Heidelberg, 1913-1923.

The Central District, Maharashtra State

Located about 80 miles southeast of Nagpur in the Chanda region are a group of mines known as Wairagarh. The mines are very old and were very rich, but have been abandoned since 1827. Tavernier named this locality the Beiragarh Mines. The diamons occurred in a reddish or yellowish sandy alluvial soil of unknown origin.

The Eastern District, Orissa State

The diamonds known to the ancients may have come from the Mahanadi River. The so-called diamond river of Ptolemy is considered to be either this river or one of its tributaries, the Ebe. The diamond-producing area on the Mahanadi is along a 28-mile length centered around Sambalpur.

The diamonds occur in a mud containing sand and gravel. Pebbles of beryl, topaz, garnet, carnelian, amethyst, and rock crystal occur with the diamonds. The source of the deposit is the granite and gneiss through which the Mahanadi flows. Gold is recovered from the sand and gravel along with the diamonds. A 210.6-carat crystal, the largest known from this locality, was discovered in 1809 at Hira Khund, an island in the Mahanadi. All workings were abandoned by 1850.

The Northern or Bundalkhand District, Madhya Pradesh State

A group of diamond mines, called the Panna mines, are along the northern edge of the Bundalkhand Plateau extending from Panna eastward to Rewa and northeastward in the direction of Allahabad. The deposits are classified as primary (pipes), secondary (conglomerates), and detrital (alluvial river terraces). The detrital gravels occur at thin horizons 19 to 26 feet below the surface. Diamonds have been recovered from pits as deep as 35 feet. In 1962, 1131 carats, including the 35-carat Vijay Diamond, were recovered from a shallow alluvial pit near Panna. A few alluvial deposits, the most important of which is located at Ramkheria, are currently being mined. The National Mineral Corporation took over diamond production in 1960.

There are three known pipes in the Panna area: Majhgawan, Hinota, and Angore. Only the Majhgawan, 12 miles southwest of Panna, is currently being worked. The pipe consists of highly serpentinized rock similar to the kimberlite of South Africa. Good-quality light green crystals exhibiting octahedral and dodecahedral habits are found in the Majhgawan pipe.

Famous Indian Diamonds

All of the famous Indian stones apparently have come from the southern district, for which Golconda seems to have been the principal market. The majority of these were found between the thirteenth and early nineteenth centuries A.D. and have had rather intriguing and mysterious adventures. We shall briefly consider the Dresden Green, Florentine, Great Mogul, Orloff, Koh-i-Nur, Pitt (Regent), and Hope diamonds. After these a list of all other notable Indian diamonds will be given.

The Dresden Green

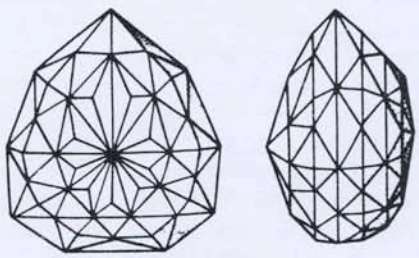
This diamond is of a very fine, clear apple green and is probably the finest stone of this color. It is flawless and weighs 40.7 carats. It is almond-shaped and is 1.5 inches long X five-sixths inch thick. August the Strong, King of Poland, purchased the stone at the Leipzig Fair in 1743 and it was preserved in the famous Green Vaults of the Royal Palace in Dresden until World War II, when the palace was damaged. it was taken to the castle Kongistein on the Elbe, then confiscated by the Soviet Trophies Organization. It has now been returned to the restored Green Vaults in Dresden.

The Florentine

The Florentine diamond has also been called the *Austrian* and the *Grand Duke of Tuscany*. It weighs 137.27 carats and is a beautiful citron yellow, showing excellent fire. The facets are arranged in nine groups radiating from the center. It was reportedly cut by L. Van Berquen for Charles the Bald, Duke of Burgundy, who lost it on the battlefield of Granson in 1476. It was then picked up by a Swiss soldier who sold it for a florin. It changed hands several times until it came into the possession of the famous Medici family of Tuscany. Tavernier saw this stone among the treasures of Tuscany in 1657. It then became part of the Austrian Crown Jewels in Vienna in 1743. After the fall of the Austrian Empire, it was taken by the royal family when they went into exile; since then, the Florentine has disappeared.

The Great Mogul

The Great Mogul is the third largest gem-quality diamond and is probably the largest of all Indian diamonds. It was found between 1630 and 1650 in the Kollur Mine of the Golconda District. It was seen in the Treasury of the Great Mogul, Aurungzebe, by Tavernier in 1665, who described the stone as looking like half an egg with a flawed edge. The diamond was actually named after Aurungzebe's father Shah Jehan, the builder of the Taj Mahal. It may have been set in his famous Peacock Throne which still exists in the Iranian Treasures. The stone came to Iran after the Sack of Delhi in 1739.



The Florentine, drawn natural size.

The Great Mogul has been confused with other famous diamonds, but the only one it could actually be identical with is the Orloff, as they both are rose-cut, have a faint bluish tinge, and are flawed.

Its original weight in the rough was reputedly 787.5 carats, but was reduced to 280 carats by the time Tavernier had seen it as a cut stone. Some authorities believe that the correct weight is really 188 carats. The great disparity in weight between rough and cut is generally accredited to the poor and unskillful manner in the way the stone was faceted by the Venetian diamond cutter Hortensio Borgio.

The Orloff

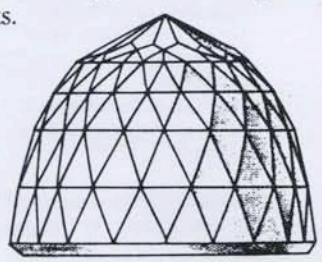
The Orloff (Orlov) was found in the early seventeenth century in the Kollur mines. It originally weighed 300 carats in the rough, but now weighs 189.62 carats

cut. It is now in the Russian Diamond Fund, set into the termination of the Imperial Sceptre. It is perfectly pure and clear and has a brilliant luster. In form, it is very similar to the Great Mogul Diamond mentioned above.

It was one of the eyes of the Brahmin temple on the island of Sheringham near Trichinopoly in southern India. It was stolen by a French soldier who sold it to an English sea captain and then found its way to Amsterdam, where in 1774 it was bought by Prince Orloff for the Empress Catherine II of Russia, who had it set into the Russian Imperial Sceptre.

The Koh-i-Nur

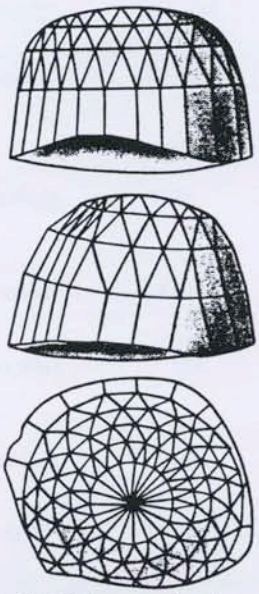
The Koh-i-Nur has been known since 1304, when it was in the possession of the Rajahs of Malwa. Ultimately, it was obtained in 1739 by Nadir Shah, the Persian conqueror of the Mogul Empire. In 1813, it went to the Rajah of Lahore and later became the property of the British East India Company, which presented it to Queen Victoria in 1850. It was exhibited at the Great Exhibition at Hyde Park in 1851. But because of its lack of brilliance due to the Indian cut, the Queen had it recut in 1852 in England by the Dutch diamond cutter Voorsanger. The work took 38 twelve-hour days. The original Indian cut stone weighed 186.06 carats; after recutting, it now weighs 106.06 carats.



The Great Mogul, drawn natural size.

The name Koh-i-Nur came about in two possible ways. When Nadir Shah first saw the stone, he exclaimed "Koh-i-Nur," Persian for *Mountain of Light*. Second and least probable, it has been considered to be a corruption of Kollur, to signify where it was found in India.

In 1937, the Koh-i-Nur was set into the Imperial Coronation Crown below "the Black Prince's Ruby" (a ruby spinel). It is now part of the Crown Jewels preserved in the Tower of London.



The Orloff, drawn natural size.

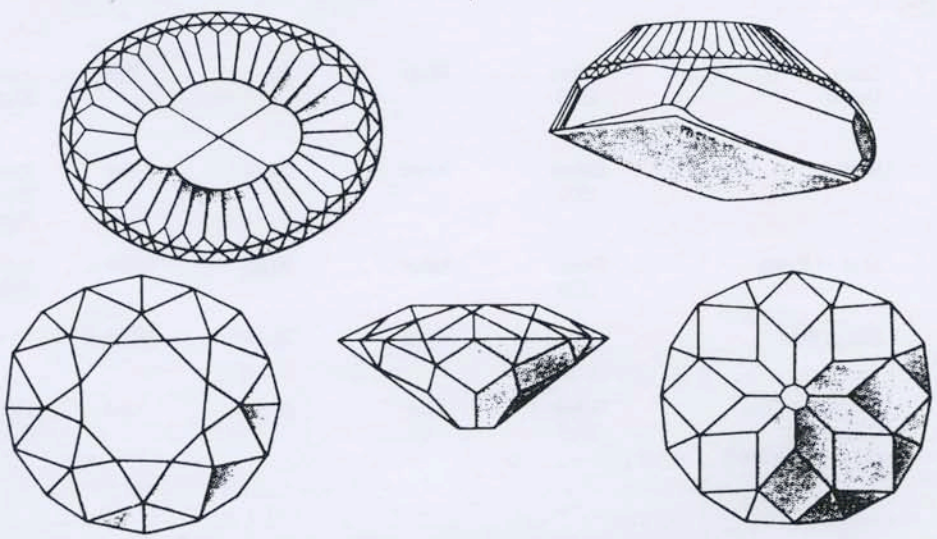
The Pitt (Regent)

Bauer called the Regent "a large diamond of singular beauty, perhaps the most perfect of all." It was found in 1701 in the Partial Mine on the Kristna River, near Golconda. The next year, it was bought by Governor Thomas Pitt (grandfather of William Pitt) of Madras. Pitt had the stone cut in London into a cushion-shaped brilliant of 140.5 carats, which was reduced from its original weight of 410 carats. The cutting took two years of work. Several small rose-cut gems from the crystal were sold to Peter the Great of Russia. In 1717, the main stone was sold to the Duke of Orleans for £135,000. The Duke was then Regent of France and so the stone was renamed the Regent.

The stone was later set into the Coronation Crown of Louis XV in 1772. It was stolen 20 years later, along with other French Crown Jewels, but was recovered 15 months later. Napoleon had the diamond set into the hilt of his sword in 1804 during his coronation. After his exile, the Regent was restored to the French Crown Jewels. It was hidden in the plaster behind a fireplace in the Chateau Chambord when Hitler's armies invaded Paris in 1940. Then, after the war was over, the diamond was returned to Paris and subsequently went on display in the Louvre.

The Hope

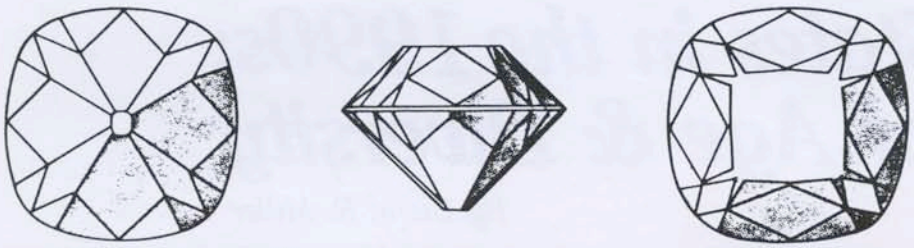
The legendary Hope diamond, with its "bad luck" reputation, was considered to be a part of the French Blue diamond found in the Kollur Mine, near Golconda. It was purchased in India in 1642 by Tavernier. It then weighed 112.125 carats in the rough and had a fine dark blue (often described as steel blue) color. In 1668, Tavernier sold it to Louis XIV, who had it recut to a triangular shape of 67.125 carats. It was stolen in 1792 during the French Revolution and was never recovered. However, by 1812, a diamond of similar color weighing 44.5 carats appeared in the possession of the London diamond dealer Daniel Eliason. Almost assuredly this stone was part of the Tavernier Blue.



The Koh-i-Nur. Drawn natural size. The top two represent the Indian cut; the bottom three represent the new form.

Notable Indian Diamonds

NAME	DATE FOUND	COLOR	WEIGHT IN CARATS	SHAPE	CURRENT OWNER	REMARKS
Akbar Shar (Shepherd's Stone)	Before 1739	White	71.70	Drop	Gaekwar of Baroda, 1867	Engraved diamond, originally weighing 116 carats. One of the eyes of the Peacock Throne.
Black Orloff (Eye of Brahma)	?	Black	67.50	Cushion	Charles F. Winson, N.Y.	Originally weighed 195 carats. Reputedly stolen from a shrine in Pondicherry.
Briolette of India	?	?	90.83	Briolette	Sold in Europe in 1971	Belonged to Eleanor of Aquitaine.
Darya-i-Nur (Iran) (Sea of Light)	Before 1739	Pink	186	Table cut	Iranian Treasury Tehran.	Possibly the Great Table. Taken during the Persian sack of Delhi in 1739.
Darya-i-Nur (Dacca)	?	White	150	Cushion	Nawab of Dacca, 1959	
Golden Maharajah	?	Golden	65.60	Pear	American Museum of Natural History, N.Y.	Exhibited at the World's Fair Paris, in 1937.
Great Table	Before 1677	Pink	242 3/16	Table cut	?	May be the Darya-i-Nur in Iran.
Hortensia (Hydrangea)	Before 1669	Pink	20	Pentagonal	French Crown Jewels, 1883.	Obtained by Louis XIV in 1669.
Jahangir	Early 17th century	White	83	Pear	C. Patel, India, 1957.	Engraved diamond; was suspended from the beak of the Mogul's Peacock Throne.
Nassak (Nasik)	?	White	43.38	Emerald	Private owner, 1970.	Originally 90 carats; from the Temple of Shiva at Nassak.
Nepal	?	White	79.41	Pear	Private owner, 1960.	Exhibited in London in 1959; found in the Golconda District.
Nizam	1835	White	277	?	Nizam of Hyderabad.	Originally weighed 440 carats; found at the Kollur Mine.
Piggott (Pigot)	Before 1775	White	49	Brilliant	?	A lost diamond; was originally given to Lord Pigot, Governor of Madras, by an Indian prince.
Sancy (Astor)	Before 1593	White	55	Pear	Astor Estate, England, 1966.	Henry III of France wore it on a cap that concealed his baldness.
Shah	Before 1591	White	88.70	Bar	Russian Diamond Treasury, Kremlin, Moscow.	Engraved diamond presented to Czar Nicholas by Persia in 1829.
Shah of Persia	Before 1739	Yellow	99.52	Cushion	Private owner, 1965.	Named after Nadir Shah after the Sack of Delhi in 1739.
Star of Este	?	White	26.16	Brilliant	?	Possibly obtained by King Farouk in 1950.
Wittelsbach (The Great Blue) (The Blue Brilliant)	Before 1722	Blue	35.56	Oval	Private owner, Germany, 1964.	Was part of the bridal treasure of Princess Maria Amelia of Austria when she married into the Bavarian Royal Family of Wittelsbach.
Taj-e-Mah (Crown of the Moon)	Before 1739	White	115.06	Rose cut	Iranian Crown Jewels, Tehran.	Was set in a pair of bracelets along with the Darya-i-Nur.



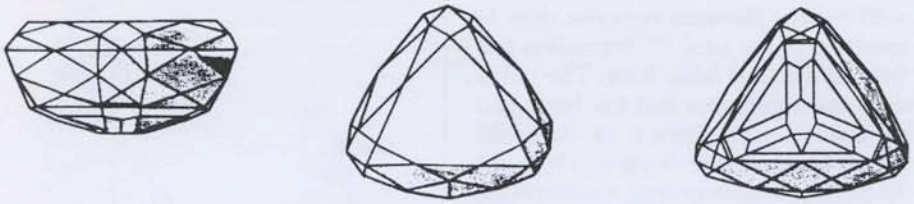
The Pitt or Regent, drawn natural size.

In 1830, Eliason sold the diamond to Henry Philip Hope, and in turn it went to Hope's Nephew Henry Thomas Hope in 1839. The diamond was then called the *Hope* and it was during this period that the bad reputation of the stone started. Around 1910 it passed into the hands of Cartier's, the famous French jewelers. They sold it to Evalyn Walsh McLean in 1911; the diamond remained among her possessions until 1949, when the late Harry Winston of New York bought it.

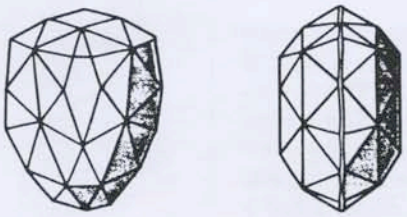
Winston presented the Hope to the Smithsonian Institution on November 10, 1958. He did this because he felt that the United States should develop a major national gem collection and that the Hope would provide a nucleus around which to build. It has left the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian only twice. The first time, in 1962, it was put on display with the Regent and Savoy at the "Ten Centuries of French Jewelry Exhibition" at the Louvre. The second time was in 1965 for a special Easter exhibition of gems in South Africa.

The Hope is a slightly irregular cushion-shaped brilliant. It is an apparently flawless Type IIb diamond. It also possesses the unusual characteristic of phosphorescing red following exposure to ultraviolet light of less than 3500 angstroms; however, it does not fluoresce. All other Type IIb diamonds phosphoresce light blue.

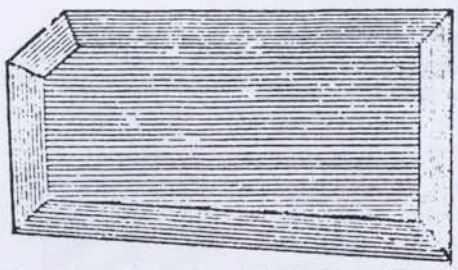
On November 13, 1975, for the first time in 65 years, the Hope was removed from its setting and was weighed. It was found to be 45.52 carats. However, before this, its weight was given as 44.5 carats. This discrepancy arises because the modern standardized metric carat is 200 milligrams, whereas the old French carat was approximately 205 milligrams.



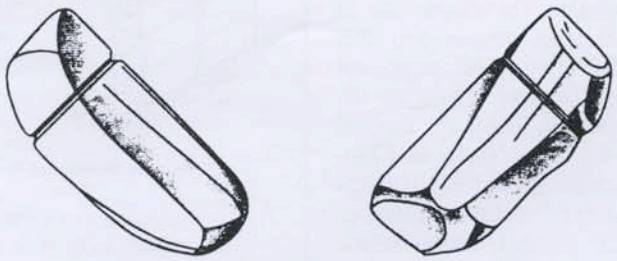
The Nassak (Nasik) (old cut). Triangular billiant, drawn natural size.



The Sancy (Astor), drawn natural size.



The Great Table, drawn natural size. It may be the Darya-i-Nur in Iran. From Tavernier.



The Shah, an engraved diamond, drawn natural size.

Conclusion

These are some of the biggest and brightest of nature's ornaments that we have managed to pull from the earth's crust. Putting them in the same place, even if it is only in our mind's eye, threatens to damage their power. We can catalog the Indian production of gems, just as we can list the thousands of priceless paintings produced by Italian geniuses over the centuries. But the compilation of this list should not diminish the stunning effect of being in the presence of a single stone of such size, beauty and value.

Philip Scalisi
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